



TEXAS  
Health and Human  
Services

# Survivors of Suicide Loss



*If you have lost a loved one to suicide, you are not alone.*

Survivors of Suicide Loss

*Each year, there are about 45,000 deaths by suicide in the U.S., and research indicates that each death by suicide impacts about 135 people. That means there are millions of survivors of suicide loss.*

*Suicide loss is one of the most painful experiences people can face. Following a loss, survivors are often overwhelmed with feelings of guilt, anger and depression.*

## Suicide Deaths are Unique

Grieving someone who died by suicide brings unique challenges as the person who died seems to have chosen death. In addition to the common feelings of grief, survivors of suicide loss may also experience the following:

### Guilt:

When someone dies by suicide, loved ones often feel like they could have or should have done something to prevent the suicide. In reality, no one can control the actions of others. Still, guilt is one of the most difficult aspects in the grieving process for most survivors.

### Stigma:

There is still a lot of stigma around death by suicide. People often don't know what to say to grieving families. Some may believe survivors should "get over it" and be able to function at full capacity within a few weeks, not understanding the full impact of suicide.

### Anger:

It is not uncommon to feel angry at the person who died by suicide. Some survivors blame their loved one for leaving family and friends to grieve this way. Expressing anger when it happens is important to the healing process.



## Questioning Why:

Survivors of suicide loss try to understand why their loved one died by suicide. Usually, the “why” is not clear. Suicide is complex and multifaceted. People thinking of suicide typically have unbearable pain, and death seems like the only way out. Their thinking may also be distorted, which is often referred to as “tunnel vision.” It is difficult to understand with a rational mind. A precipitating event often occurs right before the suicide death that is the “straw that broke the camel’s back,” rather than the cause.

## Thoughts of Suicide:

Survivors of suicide loss may have thoughts of suicide themselves. They are experiencing intense emotions and sometimes feel hopeless. It is important to remember that help is available. If you are thinking about suicide, call or text the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988.

## The Healing Process

Survivors of suicide loss don’t “get over” the death of their loved one; they get through it and learn to find a new normal for their lives. This process takes time. It also takes informal and formal supports. Informal supports include friends, family and faith communities. Formal supports include survivor support groups and counseling. You can find a survivor support group by visiting the [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention website](https://afsp.org) (afsp.org).

Below are more considerations for walking through the healing process:

### Feelings of grief may come on suddenly:

Survivors of suicide loss may have several good days in a row, then hear a song or see their loved one’s favorite flower and may experience overwhelming feelings of grief. When this happens, try to focus on positive memories of your loved one. This will get easier with time.

### Friends and family may not offer needed support:

Sometimes people closest to survivors do not know what to say and do not call or offer support. Lean on the people who are willing and able to support you.

### Survivors of suicide loss often feel bad about feeling good:

The first time a survivor laughs after their loved one dies can feel like a betrayal. Remember, survivors deserve to live happy lives too. Enjoy the positive things that happen — even the small ones.

### Holidays, birthdays and anniversaries are often difficult:

The first year after the person dies, holidays or birthdays can be extremely difficult. The anticipation about the day is often worse than the actual day. Consider starting a new tradition or celebration with family while still honoring your deceased loved one.

## Helpful Resources

### American Association of Suicidology Survivors of Suicide Handbook

View the [handbook](https://suicidology.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/SOS_handbook.pdf) at [suicidology.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/SOS\\_handbook.pdf](https://suicidology.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/SOS_handbook.pdf).

### Touched by Suicide: Hope and Healing after Loss by Michael Myers and Carla Fine

View the [book](https://www.amazon.com/Touched-Suicide-Hope-Healing-After/dp/1592402283) at [www.amazon.com/Touched-Suicide-Hope-Healing-After/dp/1592402283](https://www.amazon.com/Touched-Suicide-Hope-Healing-After/dp/1592402283).

### After a Suicide: An Activity Book for Grieving Kids

View the [book](https://www.amazon.com/After-Suicide-Activity-Book-Grieving/dp/1890534064) at [www.amazon.com/After-Suicide-Activity-Book-Grieving/dp/1890534064](https://www.amazon.com/After-Suicide-Activity-Book-Grieving/dp/1890534064).